



INSIGHT

Roxanne Bain

Professional Support Lawyer | Corporate & Commercial
CDH South Africa

From flower child to power suit: Notes on an unlikely evolution

The year is 2009. I am a second year BA Drama student at the University of Pretoria, and am firmly in my self-help book and floral skirt phase. I am sitting on the lawn outside the drama building with a group of friends (having taken a break from reading *"The Power of Now"*) to have a spirited debate with a fellow student about whether I should dye my fringe blue (said student's view was that, yes, I absolutely should).

Fast forward 16 years and I am walking onto a stage in a black evening gown (not a blue fringe in sight), accepting an award to thunderous applause. The Roxanne of 2009 would have thought this set of circumstances could only mean one thing – I am accepting my Oscar. In reality, I am at the 2025 Ansarada DealMakers Annual Gala Awards, and I am a lawyer accepting an award on behalf of the leading corporate law firm at which I work.

Wait, what? Let's take several steps back...

As a child, I certainly did not have big dreams of becoming a corporate lawyer. In fact, I spent most of my time practicing my reaction when I would inevitably be 'discovered' by some big shot from the music industry. Well, that and singing into a hairbrush. Even at that young age, I was a bit of a mixed bag. I was comfortable being front and centre, so to speak, but also reserved and bookish. At times, I had a 'devil may care' attitude, but at others, I was deeply perfectionistic and self-critical. One thing I knew for sure was that singing, dancing and acting made me come alive in a way that nothing else could. I felt completely at home on stage, and especially loved to make people laugh. My passion for the performing arts did not let up, and by the time I was applying for University in Grade 11, BA Drama was a no brainer (in the interest of transparency, I must mention that BCom Accounting was thrown about as an option for a while but – luckily for the accounting industry – this was short lived).

Studying drama was tough, and my short stint in the industry once I completed my studies was even tougher. I often hear corporate

lawyers (myself included) complain about the punishing hours, especially in big law. But, believe it or not, performing artists work longer hours at even less opportune times (nights, weekends, public holidays). As one of my drama lecturers used to say: "The theatre is a jealous lover, my dear". I began to feel overwhelmed and uncertain about my future. I wanted structure and stability, so I left that world behind and went to study what seemed like the only thing that a person who is bad at science and math might possibly excel at: law (I know, I know, many lawyers are great at math and science – I am just not one of them!).

To the surprise of absolutely everyone, I took to studying law immediately. I loved it. I loved the puzzles and problems I had to

solve. I loved all the reading and writing and arguing. I loved the history of law and the sense of prestige that goes along with this profession. Many, many sleepless nights later, I graduated and started articles at Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr. And guess what? Everything I had been running from before – overwhelm, long hours, uncertainty – was waiting for me in my new profession. It brought into stark reality what someone had once said to me: "Everywhere you go, you take your personality with you".

You see, I will always be a stressed out over-achiever, whether I am preparing to sing on a stage or drafting a deal agreement. It took a bit of time, but I have accepted that

about myself, and have found my 'groove' in my career. Yes, it is tough, but it is also deeply rewarding. I now have my dream job as a knowledge lawyer at CDH. A typical day involves rallying the troops to submit deals to DealMakers, training candidate attorneys on the basics of M&A, reading the latest case law, writing articles on topical legal issues and, of course, having a laugh with my brilliant colleagues over a cup of coffee.

I may never win the best actress Oscar, but accepting a DealMakers award for this incredible team is close enough. I would not change anything about my journey from flower child to power suit, and if I ever change careers again, it would be to become a script writer for a legal drama series... talent agents, please call me! 🎬

Everything I had
been running from
before – overwhelm,
long hours,
uncertainty – was
waiting for me in
my new profession.